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Break Averted In Chile's Ties With Church

A breakdown in relations between President Pinochet's government and the Catholic church in Chile has been averted. The church will remain cautious, however, in dealing with the military regime. New conflicts are likely, but it is to the advantage of both sides to compromise.

Earlier this month, the church seemed on the verge of an open clash with the government over the issue of help given by members of the clergy to fugitive terrorists of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left. Cardinal Silva, the Chilean primate, publicly threatened to excommunicate an influential adviser to Pinochet who had attacked the church for complicity with the Movement.

The government's release or expulsion of some church people under detention, as well as the church's embarrassment over the terrorist matter, probably precluded church leaders to back off.

The church also has bowed to Pinochet's request to dissolve its committee for peace, thereby admitting by implication that some of the committee's members aided fugitive terrorists who are members of the Movement.

Pinochet has met privately with Cardinal Silva, presumably to work out an understanding, and both men have appeared disposed to take an even-handed approach in dealing with their quarrels and possible cooperation.

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